Dark Hollow

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SYNOPSIS.

A curious crowd of neighbors invade the mysterious home of Judge Ostrander, county judge and eccentric recluse, following a veiled woman who proves to be the widow of a man tried before the judge and electrocuted for murder years before. Her daughter is engaged to the judge's son, from whom he is estranged, but the murder is between the lovers. She plans to clear her husband's memory and asks the judge's aid. Deborah Scoville reads the newspaper clippings telling the story of the murder of Algernon Etheridge by John Scoville in Dark Hollow, twelve years before. The judge and Mrs. Scoville meet at Spencer's Folly and she shows him how, on the day of the murder, she saw the shadow of a man, whittling a stick and wearing a long peaked cap. The judge engages her and her daughter Reuther to live with him in his mysterious home. Deborah and her lawyer, Black, go to the police station and see the stick used to murder Etheridge. She discovers a broken knife-blade point embedded in it. Deborah and Reuther go to live with the judge. Deborah sees a portrait of Oliver, the judge's son, with a black band painted across the eyes. That night she finds, in Oliver's room, a cap with a peak like the shadowed one, and a knife with a broken blade-point. Anonymous letters and a talk with Miss Weeks increase her suspicions and fears. She finds that Oliver was in the ravine on the murder night. Black warns her and shows her other anonymous letters hinting at Oliver's guilt. In the court room the judge is handed an anonymous note. The note is picked up and read aloud. A mob follows the judge to his home. Deborah tells him why suspicion has been aroused against Oliver. The judge shows Deborah a statement written by Oliver years ago telling how he saw her husband murder Spencer at Spencer's Folly on the night the house was burned. A vain attempt to silence the anonymous letter writer is made.

CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

"I didn't ask to see the ladies," protested Flannagan, turning with a slinking gait toward the door.

If they only had let him go! If the judge in his new self-confidence had not been so anxious to deepen the effect and make any future repetition of the situation impossible!

"You understand the lady," he interposed, with the quiet dignity which was so imposing on the bench. "She has no sympathy with your ideas and no faith in your conclusions. She believes absolutely in my son's innocence."

"Do you, ma'am?" The man had turned and was surveying her with the dogged impudence of his class. "I'd like to hear you say it, if you don't mind, ma'am. Perhaps, then, I'll believe it."

"I—" she began, trembling so, that she failed to reach her feet, although she made one spasmodic effort to do so. "I believe—Oh, I feel ill! It's been too much—I—" her head fell forward and she turned herself quite away from them all.

"You see, she ain't so eager, jedge, as you thought," laughed the bill-poster, with a clumsy bow he evidently meant to be sarcastic.

"Oh, what have I done!" moaned Deborah, starting up as though she would fling herself after the retreating figure, now half way down the hall.

She saw in the look of the judge as he forcibly stopped her, and heard in the lawyer's whisper as he bounded past them both to see the fellow out: "Useless; nothing will bridle him now;" and finding no support for her despairing spirit either on earth or, as she thought, in heaven, she collapsed where she sat and fell unnoticed to the floor, where she lay prone at the feet of the equally unconscious figure of the judge, fixed in another attack of his peculiar complaint.

And thus the lawyer found them when he returned from closing the gate behind Flannagan.

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"I cannot say anything, I cannot do anything till I have had a few words with Mrs. Scoville. How soon do you think I can speak to her?"

"Not very soon. Her daughter says she is quite worn out. Would it not be better to give her a rest for tonight, judge?"

The judge, now quite recovered, but strangely shrunk and wan, showed no surprise at this request, odd as it was, on the lips of this honest but somewhat crabbed lawyer, but answered out of the fullness of his own heart and from the depths of his preoccupation:

"My necessity is greater than her. The change I see in her is inexplicable. One moment she was all fire and determination, satisfied of Oliver's innocence and eager to proclaim it. The next—but you were with us. You witnessed her hesitation—felt its force and what its effect was upon the damnable scamp who has our honor—the honor of the Ostranders under his tongue. Something must have produced this change. What? good friend, what?"

"I don't know any more than you do, Judge. But I think you are mistaken about the previous nature of her feelings. I noticed that she was not at peace with herself when she came into the room."

"What's that?" The tone was short, and for the first time irritable.

"The change, if there was a change, was not so sudden as you think. She looked troubled, and as I thought, irresolute when she came into the room."

"You don't know her; you don't know what passed between us. She was all right then, but—go to her, Black. She must have recovered by this time. Ask her to come here for a minute. I won't detain her. I will wait for her warning knock right here."

The judge had declared his necessity to be greater than hers, and after Mr. Black had subjected him to one of his most searching looks, he decided that this was so, and quietly departed upon his errand. The judge left alone, sat, a brooding figure in his great chair, with no light in heart or mind to combat the shadows of approaching night settling heavier and heavier upon the room and upon himself with every slow passing and intolerable minute.

At last, when the final ray had departed and darkness reigned supreme, there came a low knock on the door. Then a troubled cry:

"Oh, judge, are you here?"

"Don't come any nearer; it is not necessary." A pause, then the quick question ringing hollow from the darkness: "Why have your doubts returned? Why are you no longer the woman you were when not an hour ago and in this very spot you cried, 'I will be Oliver's advocate!'" Then, as no answer came—as minutes passed, and still no answer came, he spoke again and added: "I know that you are ill and exhausted—broken between duty and sympathy; but you must answer me, Mrs. Scoville. My affairs won't wait. I must know the truth and all the truth before this day is over."

"You shall." Her voice sounded hollow, too, and, oh, how weary! "You allowed the document you showed me

She Lay at the Feet of the Unconscious Figure of the Judge.

to remain a little too long before my eyes. That last page—need I say it?"

"Say it."

"Shows—shows change, Judge Ostrander. Some words have been erased and new ones written in. They are not many, but—"

"I understand. I do not blame you, Deborah." The words came after a pause and very softly, almost as softly as her own, but which had sounded its low knell of doom through the darkness. "Too many stumbling-blocks in your way, Deborah, too much to combat. The most trusting heart must give way under such a strain. That page was tampered with. I tampered with it myself. I am not expert at forgery. I had better have left it, as he wrote it." Then after another silence, he added, with a certain vehemence: "We will struggle no longer, either you or I. The boy must come home. Prepare Reuther, or, if you think best, provide a place for her where she will be safe from the storm which bids fair to wreck us here. No, don't speak; just ask Mr. Black to return, will you?"

When Mr. Black re-entered the study, it was to find the room lighted and the judge bent over the table, writing.

"You are going to send for Oliver?" he queried.

The judge hesitated, then motioning Black to sit, said abruptly:

"What is Andrews' attitude in this matter?"

Andrews was Shelby's district attorney.

Black's answer was like the man.

"I saw him for one minute an hour ago. I think, at present, he is inclined to be both deaf and dumb, but if he's driven to action, he will act. And, judge, the man Flannagan isn't going to stop where he is."

"Black, be merciful to my misery. What does this man know? Have you any idea?"

"No, judge, I haven't. He's as tight as a drum—and as noisy. It is possible—just possible that he's as empty. A few days will tell."

"I cannot wait for a few days. I hardly feel as if I could wait a few hours. Oliver must come, even if—if the consequences are likely to be fatal. An Ostrander once accused cannot skulk. Oliver has been accused and—Send that!" he quickly cried, pulling forward the telegram he had written.

Mr. Black took up the telegram and read:

Come at once. Imperative. No delay and no excuse.

ARCHIBALD OSTRANDER.

"Mrs. Scoville will supply the address," continued the poor father. "You will see that it goes, and that its sending is kept secret. The answer, if any is sent, had better be directed to your office. What do you say, Black?"

"I am your friend, right straight through, judge. Your friend."

"And my boy's adviser?"

"I'm a surly fellow, judge. I have known you all these years, yet I've never expressed—never said what I even find it hard to say now, that—that my esteem is something more than esteem; that—that I'll do anything for you, judge."

"I—we won't talk of that, Black. Tell Mrs. Scoville to keep me informed—and bring me any message that may come. The boy, even if he leaves the first thing in the morning, cannot get here before tomorrow night."

"Not possibly."

"He will telegraph. I shall hear from him. O God! the hours I must wait; my boy! my boy!"

It was nature's irrepressible cry. Black pressed his hand and went out with the telegram.

CHAPTER XV.

He Must Be Found.

Next morning an agitated confab took place at the gate, or rather between the two front gates. Mr. Black rang for admittance, and Mrs. Scoville answered the call.

"One moment, Mrs. Scoville. How can I tell the judge! Young Ostrander is gone—fled the city, and I can get no clue to his whereabouts. I have been burning the telegraph wires ever since the first dispatch, and this is the result. Where is Reuther?"

"At Miss Weeks. I had to command her to leave me alone with the judge. It's the first time I ever spoke unkindly to her. Have you the messages with you?"

He bundled them into her hand.

"I will hand them in to him. We can do nothing less and nothing more. Then if he wants you, I will telephone."

"Mrs. Scoville—" she felt his hand laid softly on her shoulder—"there is some one else in this matter to consider besides Judge Ostrander."

"Reuther? Oh, don't I know it! She's not out of my mind a moment."

"Reuther is young, and has a gallant soul. I mean you, Mrs. Scoville, you. You are not to succumb to this trial. You have a future—a bright future—or should have. Do not endanger it by giving up all your strength now. It's precious, that strength, or would be—"

"He must be found! Oliver must be found!" How the words rung in her ears. She had handed in the messages to the waiting father; she had uttered a word or two of explanation, and then, at his request, had left him. But his last cry followed her. "He must be found!"

Mr. Black looked serious.

"Pride or hope?" he asked.

"Desperation," she responded, with a guilty look about her. "Possibly, some hope is in it, too. Perhaps, he thinks that any charge of this nature must fall before Oliver's manly appearance. Whatever he thinks, there is but one thing to do: Find Oliver."

"Mrs. Scoville, the police have started upon that attempt. I got the tip this morning."

"We must forestall them. To satisfy the judge, Oliver must come of his own accord to face these charges."

"It's a brave stock. If Oliver gets his father's telegram he will come."

"But how are we to reach him! We are absolutely in the dark."

"If I could go to Detroit, I might strike some clue; but I cannot leave the judge. Mr. Black, he told me this morning when I carried in his breakfast that he should see no one and go nowhere till I brought him word that Oliver was in the house. The hermit life has begun again. What shall we do? Advise me in this emergency, for I feel as helpless as a child—as a lost child."

"You say you cannot go to Detroit. Shall I go? Court is adjourned. I know of nothing more important than Judge Ostrander's peace of mind—unless it is yours. I will go if you say so."

"Will it avail? Let me think. I know him well, and yet not well enough to know where he would be most likely to go under impulse."

"There is some one who knows him better than you do."

"Reuther? Oh, she mustn't be told—"

"Yes, she must. She's our one adviser. Go for her—or send me."

"It won't be necessary. There's her ring at the gate. But, oh, Mr. Black, think again before you trouble this fragile child of mine with doubts and questions which make her mother tremble."

"She has sources of strength which you lack. She believes absolutely in Oliver's integrity. It will carry her through."

"Please let her in, Mr. Black. I will wait here while you tell her."

Mr. Black hurried from the room. When his form became visible on the walk without, Deborah watched him from where she stood far back in the room. A staff had been put in her hand, rough to the touch, but firm under pressure, and she needed such a staff. But she forgot gratitude and every lesser emotion in watching Reuther's expression. The young girl, running into her arms, burst out with the glad cry:

"Oliver is no longer in Detroit, but he's wanted here, and Mr. Black and I are going to find him. I think I know where to look. Get me ready, mother dear; we are going tonight."

"But," objected Deborah, "if you know where to look for him, why take the child? Why go yourself? Why not telegraph to these places?"

His answer was a look, quick, sharp and enigmatical enough to require explanation. He could not give it to her then, but later, when Reuther had left them, he said:

"Men who fly their engagements and secrete themselves, with or without a pretext, are not so easily reached. We shall have to surprise Oliver Ostrander, in order to place his father's message in his hands."

"You may be right. But Reuther? Can she stand the excitement—the physical strain?"

"You have the harder task of the two, Mrs. Scoville. Leave the little one to me. She shall not suffer."

Deborah's response was eloquent. It was only a look, but it made his harsh features glow and his hard eye soften.

But his thoughts, if not his hopes, received a check when, with every plan made and Reuther in trembling anticipation of the journey, he encountered the triumphant figure of Flannagan coming out of police headquarters.

His jaunty air, his complaisant nod, admitted of but one explanation. He had told his story to the chief authorities and been listened to. Proof that he had something of actual moment to tell them; something which the district attorney's office might feel bound to take up.

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A night of stars, seen through swaying treetops whose leaves crisping to their fall, murmured gently of vanished hopes and approaching death.

Below, a long, low building with a lighted window here and there, surrounded by a heavy growth of trees which are but the earnest of the illimitable stretch of the Adirondack woods which painted darkness on the encircling horizon.

Within, Reuther seated in the glow of a hospitable fire of great logs, talking earnestly to Mr. Black. As they were placed, he could see her much better than she could see him, his back being to the blaze and she, in its direct glare.

He could, therefore, study her features without offense, and this he did steadily and with deep interest, all the while she was talking. He was looking for signs of physical weakness or fatigue; but he found none. The pallor of her features was a natural pallor, and in their expression, new forces were becoming apparent, which gave him encouragement, rather than anxiety, for the adventure whose most trying events lay still before them.

This is what she was saying:

"I cannot point to any one man of the many who have been about us ever since we started north. But that we have been watched and our route followed, I feel quite convinced. But, as you saw, no one besides ourselves left the cars at this station, and I am beginning to hope that we shall remain unmolested till we can take the trip to Tempest lodge. How far is it, Mr. Black?"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

How Experts Are Made.

In every generation there is apt to spring up a body of men who, adding to natural abilities and an uncommon stock of assurance a certain amount of specialized knowledge, terrorize the rest of the world under the guise of "experts."

Thinking that they find something rotten in the state of Denmark, incapable of calm reflection, and eager for notoriety, they hit upon a specific for what is amiss, compared with which all others are spurious imitations.

Their field of interest may range from solar mythology to eugenics, but the threefold badge of the tribe is an overweening belief in their own infallibility coupled with a proportionate contempt for ordinary human beings, the command of a barbarous jargon and an irrepressible desire to badger and bully their unfortunate fellow-creatures.

Hard to Please Everybody.

"Doubleday is always trying so hard to correct his own faults that he never has time to find fault with other people."

"In that case he ought to be popular with his neighbors."

"You'd think so, but they accuse him of being self-centered."

Willing to Help.

"I don't see anything the matter with you," said the doctor.

"Well, I'm worried, doctor."

"About what?"

"My money."

"Oh, well, I guess I can relieve you of that."

The Kind.

"Don't you want your son to make his mark in the world?"

"Certainly, if it's a dollar mark."

Any man who can hold a fussy baby for an hour without saying naughty words is in the same class with Job.

MADE HIM CHANGE HIS SIGN

Bachelor Found That Persistent Salesmen Had Some Other Way of Getting Business.

An old bachelor, in order to prevent men annoying him by knocking at his door to dispose of their wares, affixed thereto a label to this effect: "Hawkers, take notice! The inhabitants of this house never buy anything at the door." Shortly afterward he was aroused by a loud knocking at his parlor window, and looking out he saw two fellows with clothes-props, mats, and pegs for sale. Throwing up the sash, he bawled: "Can you read?"

"Yes, master," answered one.

"Then don't you see a notice affixed to my knocker that I never buy anything at the door?"

"To be sure we do. That's the reason why we thought we would make bold and try to do a little business at the window."

The bachelor was pacified, and made a purchase. Immediately afterwards, however, he sent for a painter, and had the addition made to his announcement. "Nor at the window either."

Incidentals.

"This bill for your new frock is really a bit high," observed the plutocrat to his daughter. "Six thousand dollars is considerable to pay just for an auto suit."

"But, papa, the suit itself is quite inexpensive. The most of that bill is for the trimmings."

"Trimmings?"

"Yes. I spent $5,700 for an auto of the right tint to match the suit."—Puck.

On the Right Track.

"While you were captive of the cannibals, captain, why didn't you teach 'em not to eat people up?"

"Well, I did have er try, youngster, but the best I cu'd do was to larn 'em not ter eat wiv their knives!"—Puck.

An Easy Victim.

"What is your attitude toward tipping?"

"Oh, the usual one."

"And that is?"

"A weak-kneed deference to a foolish custom."

The number of men who believe a troupe of trained seals owes them a living seems to be increasing.

You will never get ahead by following the crowd.

WHEN AN ICEBERG COLLAPSES

Event Always Source of Great Danger to Craft That May Be in the Immediate Vicinity.

One of the main dangers in the proximity of an iceberg is its unknown extent beneath the water. It is told that the passengers of a steamboat on the Newfoundland coast successfully importuned the captain to approach an iceberg for a close inspection, says a writer in the Wide World. While still apparently sufficiently distant for safety some movement in the water or natural decay acted upon the berg, and it split apart. Instantly it began to readjust its balance. The tremendous masses beneath the water steadily rose as the pieces swung over, and one wide extending ledge came up beneath the boat. "What shall we do now?" inquired a tourist. "Get down on your knees," was the terse reply of the captain. But the great wave from the tumbling ice swept down on the boat and washed it to safety.

The collapse of an iceberg spreads danger to great distances. It may be too far distant to threaten a craft itself, but the wave it raises will swamp the largest boat in the immediate neighborhood.

Saw New Era of Warfare.

At the first interview between Napoleon and the veteran generals whom he was to command Rampon undertook to give the young commander some advice. Napoleon, who was impatient of advice, exclaimed: "Gentlemen, the art of war is in its infancy. The time has passed in which enemies are mutually to appoint the place of combat, advance hat in hand and say: 'Gentlemen, will you have the goodness to fire?'"—"Table Talk and Opinions of Napoleon Buonaparte."

Bonaparte's Unlucky Shot.

It is somewhat remarkable that the first shell fired at Toulon was by the hand of Bonaparte, and that it fell upon and entirely destroyed the very house where he and his family had resided during the short time they inhabited the town after their removal from Corsica. It was a hotel kept by the foster sister of his mother, the daughter of her nurse. The husband of the unfortunate woman was killed in the explosion.—"The Napoleon Anecdotes, edited by W. M. Ireland."